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DATE: 31 Jan

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Attached is more on the President's news conference. He mentions the John T. Downey case. CSDO and Thuermmer have copies.

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Nixon-China 130

WASHINGTON AP - President Nixon said today "we have every reason to believe" two American fliers being held prisoner by the People's Republic of China will be released as the prisoner of war problem is worked out in Vietnam.

At the same time he told newsmen at an unscheduled news conference that there are no assurances that the sentence of John T. Downey, a captive since the Korean War, would be commuted.

Nixon identified Downey as an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency and said his is a different case.

It was the first time any U.S. official has identified Downey as a CIA agent, although Harvard law Prof. Jeremy Cohen had said so unofficially.

The two American fliers are Maj. Philip E. Smith and Navy Lt. Robert J. Flynn. Both were captured when their planes flew near Hainan Island in separate incidents during the earlier phases of the Vietnam War.

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WASHINGTON Nixon-Kissinger Lead a140 4th add: phrase."

-Nixon said Kissinger is not going to Hanoi to greet American prisoners of war to be released there soon and said he personally will not go to the West Coast to welcome them because the POWs should be allowed to return to their families as soon as possible.

"We should not grandstand it . . . we should not exploit it," Nixon said.

-As for two U.S. fliers now held in China after being shot down in the mid 1960s, Nixon said the issue had been discussed when he was in China and that he has "every reason to believe these fliers will be released on the initiative of the People's Republic of China," as the situation "is worked out" in Vietnam. The fliers were identified as Navy Lt. Commr. Robert Flynn and Air Force Maj. Philip Smith. Nixon said a CIA agent now held in China, John Downey, "is a different case," and that "we have no assurance" that the Chinese will commute his prison sentence.

Com: -He said his meeting with Thieu would be held at a "mutually convenient" time some time in the spring at the Western White House in San Clemente, Calif. He didn't give a specific date nor elaborate on the purpose of the meeting, but his later references to the Indochina reconstruction included mention of South Vietnam and indicated post-war aid would be a major item on the agenda.